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ABSTRACT

A preschool program involving parents in such activities as classroom observation, teaching, and group discussions with other parents is described in this paper. The program's goals are to provide healthy growth and development opportunities for children and to strengthen parenting skills. Parents are taught about development and behavior patterns and the importance of nutrition and success in early childhood. They are assisted and encouraged to make the home a learning environment. The program's philosophy and structure are described and summative comments regarding typical reactions to and outcomes of program activities are provided. Evaluation of the program determined that the program is cost effective, elicits continual support from parents, leads to enrollment of siblings, and attracts persons from varying socioeconomic, ethnic, and language backgrounds. (Author/DB)

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HOW ONE CITY GOT PARENTS INVOLVED©(PANEL SESSION)
THEME TWO: THE CHILD, HIS PARENTS AND HIS COMMUNITY

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I) Introduction:

The city of Oakland in the State of California, U.S.A., is an urban community of some 360,000 population, extending along the mainland side of San Francisco Bay, opposite the Golden Gate and the cosmopolitan metropolis of San Francisco. Oakland is a city of many diverse ethnic and language groups, an extensive economic spread, a significant number of working mothers and a growing population of single heads of households.

It is in this environment and my calling upon a lifetime of working with children and parents, that this paper will be based. My conclusions derive from personal and clinical studies, spanning more than a decade of experience, rather from research, per se.

II) Objectives:

My primary and specific objective in this paper is to describe how to involve parents and their preschool children in a dual program which strengthens parenting skills and provides healthy growth and development opportunities for children.

Some purposes of this dual program include:

1) To increase knowledge of the development and behavior patterns of one's own preschool child, coupled with a broader knowledge of general human developmental patterns, and application of these new learnings as they become meaningful in the life of the parent.

2) To enable parents to see the value of providing these experiences in the home by providing learning techniques and skills to reinforce such home experiences.
3) To work with mothers and their preschool children, together to improve the child's health, nutrition and success during the early years and beyond.
4) To give preschool children enrichment experiences.
5) To help strengthen or teach parents skills we feel helps the child and to open new areas of thought regarding children's behavior and learning. We do not intend to make parents either teachers or group leaders, although many develop such ease with the children that we have encouraged them to take some formal training and education and to continue working with children professionally.

III) Limitations of this Paper:

The paper is limited to gaining an understanding of how the parents of preschoolers are successfully involved in a program with their children and the benefits derived from this involvement:

A) This paper describes only one type of parent education class: the parent-child observation class, as well as how this class bridges the the disciplines of early childhood education and parent education.
B) A history of adult education in California, U. S. A., under whose aegis parent-child observation classes evolved, is not covered.
C) No attempt is made to discuss parent education classes elsewhere in the United States.
D) Further, no attempt is made to compare adult education or early childhood education philosophies nor to analyze the literature of these two disciplines.
E) No effort is made to discuss the variety of early childhood, child development or parent education programs now common in the United States.

Concepts and conclusions presented in the paper are empirical, drawn from more than ten years' of personal classroom and administrative experiences. While this approach is legitimate for purposes of this paper, it in no way eliminates the desire and need for further research on the subject.

IV) The Program: A Parent-Teacher Partnership:

A) General Information: Let me describe our parent-child observation program. It is unique in many ways from other parent education programs in the State of California. Our program is for the parents of children two and one-half years old to Kindergarten age (about five and one-half years). The children are our laboratory class, and parents spend time observing their own child at play, participating in the children's program as 'mother-teachers' and being involved in parent group discussions.

B) Definitions: There are three major participants in this program: parents, children and teachers. For the purpose of this paper these participants will be defined as follows:

Parents: Either the mother or father or guardian of a child or paid caregiver who has continuous daily responsibility for the care of the child.

Children: Preschool age boys or girls who are attending class with their parents.

Teacher: Credentialed adult educators who have obtained a B.A. degree or higher and have acknowledged expertise in early childhood education and child growth and development. This expertise may have been gained by education or experience or a combination of both. There are two teachers responsible for one parent-child observation class. They work as a team, rotating responsibility equally between the children's

nursery school program and the parents observation and discussion program.

C) Program Structure: The parent-child observation project includes at least seven classes for parents (about 240 parents). Each class meets one morning a week for three hours in a community facility which provides opportunity for both indoor and outdoor activities. These classes include a program of planned activities with the child as the participant and the mother as the observer. This constitutes half of the three-hour class. The other half of the class-time is spent by the mothers in discussion with the teacher on various aspects of preschool development, while the children's program continues.

We accept all children from a family into class as long as age requirements are met. Infants are not allowed in the program, but are cared for in a special infant room. Usually a grandmother is in charge of the infants, so that mothers are able to participate in the program. A mother is more likely to attend class and be receptive to ideas if all her young children are with her and are receiving good care.

We do not separate the children by ages. Although the mixing of ages makes it more difficult for the teachers to develop a workable program, it does create a more realistic situation for parents and hence is of more value in terms of parent education. (I am also convinced it is more valuable in terms of what children learn from each other). What better way to teach growth and develop stages than to have parents see it unfold before their eyes in the behavior and activities of the child. Age groupings do occur during snack or special activites. More often than not, most children choose activities appropriate for their age or skills without undue adult direction.

At the beginning of the morning, the parents are with their children, observing their own child's actions and relationships to other children and adults, and in most instances, putting their observations into writing on simple record sheets for further use in discussion periods.

D) Program Philosophy: Our general philosophy in the parent-child observation program is to involve parents in a different way from the more familiar nursery school, day care center, parent-cooperative nursery school, or the government-funded Head Start Programs. We offer a different dimension in parent education. Parents observe their own child at play and keep a weekly record. At the end of the year, the parents writes a summary of her observations. This is, in fact, a record of her own child's growth and development.

Each week, parents talk about what happens with their children either at home or at school. This use of observation and discussion about child growth and development and family life lends itself to make adults of varied backgrounds feel comfortable within the program.

Also, adults are truly participants and self-learners, rather than a passive group listening to 'experts' talk about what should be done with children. Having parents watching everything that is going on makes teachers and parents true partners in the process of parent education.

It is the parents' very willingness to do the best possible things for their children that truly opens the door for adult learning i.e., changing attitudes and behaviors. Adults do not easily change closely held personal convictions, especially in so highly an emotional area as family lifestyles and child rearing practices.

In the parent-child observation class there is planned correlation between the experiences of the child in the nursery school and the developmental understanding and teaching techniques shown the mother to aid her in providing similar experiences in the home.

As parents observe their children, we encourage questions about teacher techniques and philosophy. We want parents to ask why we teachers did a certain thing in a certain way with their children. In this way we offer child growth and development theories in specific ways which relate to a specific mother and her child. We not only talk individually with the mother, but each week's observations are read and the teachers make comments or give answers to questions noted.

We emphasize over and over again that in our class everybody is learning; child, parent and teacher (sometimes teacher most of all!) We teachers do not claim that our rules and techniques are perfect, nor should they necessarily be accepted by the parent. We do encourage questions and comments about what we do. We hope for acceptance, but realize fully that adults change their attitudes very slowly in areas of deep personal meaning.

We do, however, ask that parents abide by our rules and use our techniques within the nursery school. These are our rules:

1) A child is never spanked, threatened or punished.
2) Children are never left unsupervised.
3) No child is allowed to hurt another child, himself or an adult.
4) No child is allowed to do anything that would endanger himself or another child.
5) No child is allowed to be destructive to nursery school property.

In all fairness, a child may be truly creative when he paints a wall or takes a chair apart.

However, from an adult view point such activities are expensive and therefore are limited in our program.

These rules allow us to build a very special kind of children's program. In an atmosphere which says 'what is not forbidden is allowed' creativity, intellectual curiosity, problem solving, individuality and self discipline truly flourish. Parents are not unaware of the inter-actions they observe as children play in this environment. Parents, even if they do not carry all our theories into the home situation, gain new understandings of how different approaches to child rearing influences a child's behavior, growth, development and learning style.

E) Our Children's Program: In order to observe children, our program is set up to allow for the maximum amount of freedom for the children. Adults are asked to step back and do a minimum amount of direction of children. Children can then interact amongst themselves naturally. We feel play is the best learning media for children. Play is the work of children and toys are their tools. We structure our educational program by the activities we offer the children. Everything we do with children is teaching them something. What are they learning, not only from the educational point of view, but from the human point of view? Every activity we use has some value to the children's total development.

These activities are done in ways that parents may duplicate them at home. (Modeling behavior for parents to observe is a continuing teacher priority).

We try to create a 'child's world', safe and interesting. Children of all ages are together in the program. They flow freely from activity to activity. Motivation and interest are the determing factors as to what the child does and how long he stays with an activity. Children are by no means allowed to 'run wild'.

An inter-disciplinary approach is used to build a creative program. That is, many theories dealing with many elements of human development are used. For instance, we draw upon such experts as Gesell & Ames (importance of physical developmental stages); Erickson, (personality development as related to childhood and society); Piaget, (intellectual developmental stages); Montessori (use of special toys and techniques to aid intellectual development); Mead, (an anthropological viewpoint); Ginott, Baruch, Bettelheim, Redl, (sociological and psychological approaches to behavior, discipline, family relations); Brazelton and Spock, (health standards and an overall philosophy to child-rearing, beginning with infancy).

Personality development, physical development, emotional development, intellectual development, social development are all equally important parts in our adult education program. We feel that the quality of our children's program determines the quality of our adult education program; hence every effort is made to 'practice what we preach.'

F) Our Adult Program: Parent-child observation classes involve the parent in a weekly three-fold child development and parent education program.

1) As an observer and recorder, the parent writes a 30 minute observation of her child while playing.
2) Under supervision of the teacher, parents themselves become teachers in the nursery school program.
3) When not participating as a parent-teacher, the parents become students, lead by the teacher in a 90 minute discussion group. About 20% of the students become 'parent-teachers' every fourth to sixth week. 80% of the students are participants in the observation and discussion periods.

I will now elaborate on the three-fold program:

I) The Parent as an observer and recorder of her own child: Observations are usually written, but may be oral. The observations of one's own child is a key way which we de-develop new parenting skills on the part of the mother which will help her to understand the meaning of her child's behavior. It is a way of introducing theories of growth and development to parents in a non-threatening way. What can be of more interest to a mother than understanding her own child's behavior and developmental stage?

Many parents are initially hesitant or resistant towards writing a weekly record. Some feel it is a waste of time; others are concerned about grammatical and spelling mistakes, or whether the teacher will be able to decipher their handwriting. Some comments have been, "What is there to write about?", or "I can't spell." However, parents are reassured that the teacher's interest in the observation is in getting to know the child better and having the parent utilize the observations in her class work and at home. Writing of observations start slowly and cautiously. Parents are encouraged to write down whatever they see their child doing. Teachers read each weekly observation and jot down encouraging comments on how to see more or what certain behavior might mean developmentally. Resistance and hesitancy gradually diminish as the mother becomes involved, and at times enthralled, watching her own child.

Sometimes, however, writing or recording is impossible because the parent herself is unable to read or write, or cannot express her observations fluently in the English language. One blind mother came with a friend. The friend observed the child and later read those daily observations to the blind mother. The blind mother transcribed the notes into braille for a permanent record of

her daughter's activities. In one class, parents were asked to observe certain things their children were doing and later review their observations orally during the discussion time. Parents, whether illiterate or literate, discovered, what I intuitively feel, that most of the time mothers are keen observers of their own children.

Observing during class time allows for parents to become aware of actually how much they are learning about their child by watching; recording gives a permanent and ongoing record of the child's activities and behavior. This dual act of observing and recording offers a rare opportunity for the parent to compare her child's behavior from week to week and to raise to a conscious level the full value of observation as a tool for positive parenting.

Recording also gives the parent a chance to analyze her own thoughts about her child as well as to develop answers to questions such as, "Why is this happening?", "How come he acts this way?", "How well does my child play with other children?". Since one of the objectives of the class is to allow children to interact with the minimum of adult intervention, only teachers and 'parent-teachers' are accountable for the children's activities, allowing the 'observing mother' to be truly free of responsibility while she records her child at play.

During the observation period, most mothers are physically very close to their child and the proximity appears reassuring to both. Although a child is free to go to his mother at anytime, contrary to creating dependency, as one might predict, the opposite proves true. Children play with freedom and confidence, seemingly oblivious to mother. A few simple materials are provided parents to facilitate observing and recording, such as pencils, observation sheets and a heavy folder used as a writing board and file.

In addition, children wear name tags, color-coded to differentiate age groupings. (Both folders and tags are stored in class). Observations are used in many ways throughout the year, and at term's end, a compilation is made describing some particular area of the child's development chosen by the mother.

Some of my own conclusions on these observations are:

1) Most mothers find it threatening to have some person other than herself observe or judge her child.
2) While most observations are seldom 'objective', I am constantly amazed how keenly most parents do observe, and how their recording skills progressively improve in clarity and definitativeness. We accept the mother's recordings without criticism.

Since one of our 'rules' is not to use textbooks, parents discover how two, three and four year olds differ by using their, the parents, own observation skills. Over a three week period, utilizing a special observation form, all parents observe children by age groupings. (This is also a relatively non-threatening way of having mothers observe one another's child). Each successive week, all two years olds, three year olds and four year olds are observed. Observations are discussed in small groups and certain behavior is identified, i.e. how many times did a child contact his mother, another adult, another child?

The groups then come together to compare their findings. A large chart is made as each age group is studied. On the fourth week, all age groups are compared and an attempt is made to generalize patterns of behavior. For instance, it is observed yearly how frequently two year olds contact mother, such contacts becoming less frequent by three and almost non-existant by age four. ("Oh, my two year old isn't spoiled or babyish, he's acting his age!" is not an uncommon self-discovery comment.)

Mothers become aware of general principles of growth and development (in their own child) by using their own powers of observation and analysis. Without exception, regardless of literacy or education, each group doing this unit inevitably identifies (with almost textbook precision) most of the characteristics of growth and development found during the preschool years. At a recent reunion of my classes, many parents brought along their observation folders. Even after ten years, these observations were valued.

II) The Parent As A Teacher:

Each week at least five parents become teachers with the children's program. The credentialed parent education teacher is responsible for the overall nursery school schedule and the supervision of parents working with the children. Parents select their teaching days and activities, usually participating eight to ten times during the school year. Upon arrival, each teaching-mother selects the card describing her activity responsibilty, while each observing mother takes her observation folder. The teaching-mother dons a red apron and begins working with the children.

The red apron enables children to identify those adults who are ready and able to help them. Please keep in mind there are many adults on the premises, often as many as 35. Before children learn who these adults are, they understand the meaning of the 'red-apron mommies'.

Parents are not expected to perform as if they were credentialed teachers, but rather to use their own talents and parenting skills in a nursery school setting. They are, however, under the direction of a credentialed teacher and constrained by some simple rules. These rules help provide an atmosphere in which children and adults may grow in skills and self satisfaction, and

evolve as a way of meeting specific class needs. With so many different parenting styles, religious and ethnic values, economic, regional and educational diversity and age and marital statuses, developing a harmonious environment was a challenge. Nevertheless, learning along with the parents enabled me to arrive at a workable answer.

The answer is that no parent is expected to change any of her child rearing values, but only to abide by these rules for the sake of class harmony during the three hour work period. Most parents, though some very relutanctly, agree to try new ways in discipline.

At the end of the day, mother-teachers and the teacher meet for a review of successful or disasterous activities, puzzling or pleasing behavior of children and general concerns. Many of the themes covered during discussion are re-introduced at these short meetings, thus encouraging parents to utilize principles of growth and development in their practical work with children.

Being a 'mother-teacher' may be frightening to those inexperienced in handling groups of children. These women (men) are maintaining homes, providing their families with a myriad of services, bringing in added income from outside employment. Transferring these valuable life experiences to preschool routines is not as insurmountable as many would expect. Mothers are encouraged to choose activities they enjoy or are most comfortable doing. By using the strengths and interests of the students, the children's program is enriched and parents gain a new appreciation of their homemaking skills.

Gradually, feelings of competency increase as parents become more responsive to trying new techniques with children or considering another's point of view as worthy of respect.

Neither tests nor grades are given; learning is measured by changes in the behavior or attitudes of the mother and/or the child. Inasmuch as the child is involved in only three hours of school a week, changes must be attributed to parental influences, rather than the teacher's. As mothers participate, they become familiar with materials, and how and when to use them. It is our hope such familiarity will make it easier for mothers to transfer nursery school activities to the home environment.

When a mother dons her red apron, she takes on a role unfamiliar to her child. Helping a child handle feelings of jealousy, envy, or anxiety as he shares his beloved mother with other children is made easier in the warm and supportive environment of the class. Mothers are also disquieted when their usually gentle child hits, or their carefree child clings or their cheerful child mopes. These behaviors are unsettling, especially when mothers know many a pair of eyes are upon her and her child. The teachers try to reduce stress by encouraging the mother to meet her child's needs with an extra hug or a bit of extra attention. In addition, these experiences become discussion period themes and mothers share with one another how they feel when their child interferes with participation duties or how they have successfully handled the situation. As mothers become more at ease and experienced with the group of children, they begin to realize that participation is not the drudgery it first appeared to be, but rather intimately tied to their observation and discussion activites and is a very practical way of learning more about children and themselves. Many mothers, because of the participation experience, are now pursuing careers in child care, recreation or teaching.

III) The Parent As A Group Discussion Participant:

Each semester's beginning is frightening to me as I wonder how I will be able to lead interesting discussions with such diverse needs and goals as are reflected by mothers of parent-child observation classes. It is at discussion time that we learn not only parenting theories, but the most about each other as parents and people. As we meet week after week, it isn't long before a wonderful warmth, support and acceptance develops and we begin a delightful journey of learning, a seemingly magical experience, which for many, continues well beyond the preschool years' of their children.

There is a course outline which is evaluated yearly by the parents and re-written at timely intervals by the teacher. As the semester progresses, discussions tend to reflect what is of relevant interest to the parents; the outline is used as a general guide and evaluation tool. As parents make their needs, concerns and questions known, teachers incorporate specific problems into broader general topics. Sometimes guest speakers are invited; sometimes movies, role-playing or 'buzz' group techniques are used.

Discussion time is informal, a time for simple refreshments and relaxation. One class, however, decided on having mothers bring something homemade, reflecting a person's ethnic or religious heritage or geographical roots. With the teacher's encouragement, mothers talked about their 'time honored' values, about disclipine and filial love and respect. During the weekly discussions, searching questions were shared concerning keeping such values in a rapidly changing world. In a less serious vein recipes were exchanged, as were traditional ways of celebrating holidays. Many discussions are delightfully entertaining and even funny, others quite deep,

serious and at times personal. The teacher must be constantly alert to maintain her position as a discussion facilitator, avoiding taking the role of group therapist.

Discussion time is not always used for talking. Activities observed by parents are often introduced. For example, after discussing how their child used art materials, paints, finger-painting, clay, these materials are made available for the parents to try. Experiencing what their child may be feeling, getting an insight into the delight and satisfaction which comes with using art materials gives parents a chance to do more than discuss the value of 'art' in the life of a child.

Some parents have never played with art materials as children. By having the opportunity to do so, attitudes about using 'messy' materials may begin to change. Some parents become so delighted about using art materials, they not only provide them at home for their children, but seek out adult classes for themselves.

Parents consider discussion time as the 'highlight' of their week... They look forward to talking with other adults, relaxing and having a break from the routines of mothering and homemaking. Involving parents and keeping them involved are best done when topics meet needs pertinent to their lives, and the lives and well-being of their children and families.

For instance, during one discussion, the question was raised as to how important good eyesight is to overall development. After discussion, movies and speakers from local agencies, the mothers voted to have an eye-screening program come to the class. An optometrist tested the eyes of all of the children in each family, regardless of age.

A very shy, clinging child was diagnosed as being extremely near-sighted. On the first day to class with his new glasses, he walked out in the yard he once feared so much, hopped upon a tricycle and peddled away.

That marked the first day his mother attended the discussion period without having her son come looking for her in panic. No lecture by the most renowned health expert could have been more convincing as to the importance of early detection of eye defects than the change in behavior parents saw in this little boy. Eye screening, and eventually hearing and speech testing, became annual events in most classes.

IV) The Role Of The Father:

Fathers must be involved if the program is to have optimum success. It is much easier for new ideas to be introduced within the family if the father is supportive of the new ideas. We have not been able to develop a viable program for fathers because of our budget. However, we have tried several very successful activities with fathers. For the past five years, classes have met with fathers for a once-a-year group discussion. The men wanted more such discussions. After the fathers came to this 'Discussion for Dads', our entire program improved.

The men began to support their wives when new ideas were suggested at home. Husbands told their wives that they felt going to parent-child observation class was important and they were proud of the extra effort on the part of their wives. Men became more involved in what their children were doing and did more things with their children. Husbands would regularly ask their wives what happened at nursery school and what topics were discussed by the mothers.

V) Parent Recruitment:

Recruitment methods are those the supervisor and teachers believe will appeal to the adults of each particular neighborhood.

One way is the written announcement which is worded in simple language, in some cases using either Spanish and/or Chinese with English. Another way is soliciting television, radio and newspaper coverage. A third way is speaking before community groups. Referrals are welcome from pediatricians, clinics and social work agencies.

The most effective recruiters are parents themselves. They make class activities known throughout their neighborhoods by creating posters and bringing friends and neighbors to visit classes. Since many adults either cannot or do not read notices, we learned effective recruiting had to be the product of a multi-dimensional continuous campaign. In the economically deprived neighborhoods, extraordinary approaches are used, such as sponsoring early childhood fairs, or contacting mothers personally.

In surveying the participants, most appeared to attend class for the purpose of offering their child a good nursery school experience. Other reasons for coming ranged from a need to 'get out of the house', or of loneliness, a desire to help their children learn English or as referrals from medical or social workers.

CONCLUSIONS

A) The program is cost-effective, since hundreds of families are served without duplication of staff or equipment.

B) Continued involvement, often spanning each successive sibling's preschool years, attests to its meaningfulness to parents.

C) Positive parenting is encouraged, while at the same time, healthy development of children is enhanced.

One of the special values of the class is that it affords the mother an uninterrupted period of time in which she may quietly observe her own child without being responsible for his

supervision. She sees him in a new way as he plays in an environment in which there is a minimum of restraint on creative imagination and impulse. As the mother observes her child, she is also observing how the environment is designed, how materials and equipment are used and how the teacher interacts with her child.

By designing the total environment to be adaptable to the home and by being a role-model herself, the teacher is setting the stage for parents to question and challenge what they see.

By doing this, the teacher is allowing parents to analyze incidents, react to teacher techniques and discuss possible alternatives. For the teacher to operate in such a situation, it is essential she be well anchored in early childhood theories, knowledge and research and be able to translate these into the skills needed to give young children a happy and positive learning experience.

In the event the teacher bases her program or actions upon personal convictions rather than theory, she makes it difficult for parents to question or debate an incident, since they are risking attacking the teacher's values. However, in an atmosphere where parents question theories, observe them in action and practice them as class members, insights into how one parenting technique may enchance growth and development better than another begins to develop. If what is modeled at nursery school takes root in the daily life of the family, positive parenting skills will continuously enchance the healthy development of the child.

D) Varying socio-economic, ethnic and language groups will attend. How to get mothers involved in preschool programs seems to be an almost universal question and concern. Parent-child observation classes, being part of adult education, has no compulsory attendance requirements, hence parents , attend or classes are cancelled. A great deal

of time and thinking by teachers is spent making coming to class attractive to mothers. This becomes more complex when the group is heterogenous. Major factors which attract parents are a quality children's program, convenient location and a discussion group centered upon the needs of parents. Classes housed in neighborhoods not served by public transportation attract a local and generally homogeneous group; programs housed in an excellent facility and accessible to public transportation attract the widest range of diversity in backgrounds. Some classes are opened with the specific intent of serving one particular ethnic group. For instance, we have classes in poverty areas or for Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking mothers, as well as for Native American and Black parents. Sites for these classes are usually housed in a familiar community center or church. When feasible, parent education students are a part of other adult classes learning English, sewing or job skills.

There is value to each type of class grouping. To attract and motivate parents, it is important to offer a choice. When parents are in control of choosing the group most comfortable to them, attendance is usually high and interest is sustained.

E) In lieu of mother, the fathers, grandparents or other relatives will attend. Historically, only mothers came to the observation class, but changing lifestyles, changing sex roles and more working mothers caused us to open enrollment to any adult who has continuing responsibility for the care of a child. This could mean fathers or grandparents or other relatives or paid caregivers. Any adult responsible for the care and upbringing of a child would benefit from involvement in the class.

In addition to this rationale, we felt no child should be excluded from a nursery school experience just because the mother was unable to attend. Fathers attended if they held

night jobs, or, in one case when one switched roles with the mother and became a'house-husband'. Children of working mothers came with paid caregivers or relatives. It was not unusual, however, to have working mothers attend class on their day off. One nightshift nurse came to class directly from her job. Grandparents attending class provided younger mothers with valuable perspectives concerning child-rearing. Our youngest grandmother was 40 and she came with her daughter of four and her three-year-old granddaughter.

F) Broader community interests and self-improvement is evidenced by:

As the term progresses, immediate and pressing concerns about child rearing and family problems are usually addressed. Gradually, parents become ready to explore areas beyond the stated class goals of growth and development, child-rearing, parenting and family life. What evolves is an 'informal agenda' which may range from the sharing of interests and hobbies to more sensitive concerns of a personal nature. Sharing of hobbies or special talents is usually fun and a time of keen involvement leading many parents to discover new skills and satisfactions.

When presenting topics of community concerns, parents expand their narrower role of 'parent-learner' to the broader one of 'concerned citizen'. In presenting arguments and discussing issues or advocating positions, it is not unusual to witness the metamorphoses of a shy, retiring woman into a more self-assured person. Parent observation classes, in a sense, become training grounds for future community and school leaders.

Personal problems are part of the 'informal agenda' too, as it is almost impossible to keep them from being introduced. A parent may be burdened with a concern and turn to the class for help: "My husband wants to have his ill mother come and live with us. She requires constant care...what am I to do?"; "We are getting a divorce...how can I begin

again in a job and still care for my children?"; "My husband is on duty 6,000 miles away, the children need him and I'm so lonely."; "I don't think I love my children, I feel so ashamed of feeling this way."

Those deeply personal issues demand of each listener an ability to grow in empathy and understanding. From these discussions a community resource file began as mothers shared information explaining social services available in our area. No small degree of personal courage is sometimes needed to 'expose' these problems.

In one case a mother of a handicapped child, sensing her child was being rejected by many of the children and parents, chose to tell the group about her little girl's problem. After hearing of the Herculean efforts and sacrifices made by the mother, many of us found new dimensions to the word LOVE. Because the pediatrician recommended our program, the mother enrolled, even though--expecting rejection and hostility.

Although not every mother was accepting, much warmth and understanding slowly replaced the isolation surrounding this mother and child. As group support increased, this handicapped child became the source of new and positive learning experiences for us all.

Long before there was a law mandating the inclusion of handicapped children into tax-supported preschool programs, our class accepted children with severe hearing and speech problems, epilepsy, neurological handicaps, cerebral palsy, physical disfigurements and personality disorders. Each child was a new challenge and learning experience. Adults found themselves learning how to work with the handicapped and consequently 'enriching their own mothering skills'.

Some benefits were long term as in the case of one mother who became very interested in helping a deaf child.

She discovered she was talented in learning and using sign language. This led her into an unexpected career as a translator for the deaf and mute, as well an an innovator of a sign language program for her local elementary school. This is only one example of how continued participation in observation classes has broader benefits for parents and community than the basic curricula would indicate.

G) Parent education, including preparation of the preschool child for his school experience, is feasible with parents in economically deprived communities. When these parents are shown how they can help the young child prepare to cope successfully with the preschool experience, and are shown in a manner which makes sense to them, they are similar to any other group of parents in their efforts to help the child achieve in this area of individual and societal significance.

H) Parents showed more awareness of growth and development in their children and of their own responsibility in aiding this process than they had at the opening of the classes.

I) There was an increase in parental understanding of the role of the parent as the child's first and primary teacher. Observations showed a mother's growing ability to recognize the importance of all areas of growth...cognitive, social, emotional and physical.

J) Teaching the non-English speaking child to understand and speak in English was simplified when mothers were also exposed to English. Children showed less hesitancy in attempting to speak English than did the adults, and language differences never seemed to impede interaction between the children.

K) Many parents showed limited concepts of routine and order, of spatial relationships and the use of play materials as a method of developing such concepts. Teachers worked to develop

an understanding of play as a primary learning method for children. As parents analyzed the education and developmental purposes behind the use of creative materials, puzzles, dramatic play, block building, and the importance of reading aloud to children and encouraging conversation and listening skills, they became increasingly able to accept their own responsibility for providing these positive play experiences at home.

Most early childhood educators recognize the tremendous influence for good or ill parents have over their children. Involving parents in the preschool program of their youngsters has been successfully accomplished by blending two educational disciplines: early childhood and parent education into one program.

Further utilization of this concept may offer a solution to the often asked question, 'How do you involve parents?'

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